

HW, LF

re The Plot to Kill the President

Following ^{GW}HW's 31Dec72 memo on this book, I had a bookstore order a copy, it finally came, and I finally got around to reading it. On some aspects I am not competent, but agree with HW on all but one. Yes, this is an experienced writer, one who knows what is needed to construct a novel. He undoubtedly has done better, and probably worse. Like HW, I find flaws, loose ends, and these suggest the denouement may have had to be re-done, possibly in haste and possibly by someone else. If the writer does not have firsthand experience with the OSS and the CIA he has unusual connections.

The one point where I find disagreement with HW is his contention that all but one of the intelligence agencies are correctly identified -- the DIA. On page 130 Sen; Welles lists the DIA (but does not describe it) along with the others. In the same passage he describes his own creation, the JIA, as a sort of super-agency set up to coordinate all the existing ones, including DIA. As far as I know, the dirty work attributed to the JIA far exceeds anything of the sort I've seen credited to the DIA, which seems to run more to electronic marvels like the Pueblo and the Liberty.

As HW seems to, I incline strongly ~~to~~ think that this book was written ~~before~~ before the RFK and King assassinations. If so, it could have been done independently by an experienced writer of this kind of novel -- assuming he was interested and well-enough informed. But I think it more likely that it was contracted for within carefully defined guidelines, probably during the Garrison flap, and then shelved when it became clear that Garrison was going to be contained. The date of its actual publication, August, 1972, suggests that it actually may have appeared -- apparently with a new ending -- in response to the Watergate crisis, before it became clear that that too, could be contained.

Let me explain. In general, there have been three types of books on the assassination which appear to have been encouraged secretly but officially -- as indicated by ease of publication, expensive production jobs, concerted promotions and so on. The first type is the critics-and-scavengers smear like that of Lewis & Schiller, and, not much better, a paperback of roughly the same 1967 vintage by Charles Roberts. Another type is the kind represented by the Alfred Newman book, published at great cost and incapable of leading to anything but confusion. The third and most interesting ~~mix~~ type of these works which have enjoyed help along the way is the partial expose which stops short of really embarrassing anyone but reveals a few crumbs to keep the peasants from grumbling too much. The first example was Epstein's book. Later, when another wave of discontent was running, Thompson's book served much the same purpose -- in a most expensively-produced book by a publisher who does not normally operate in this market. Both Inquest and Six Seconds in Dallas enjoyed unrestrained publicity. They were safe to review and discuss. In my opinion both served a desired purpose by dealing with a few questions the critics were raising -- but certainly not too many.

In other words, both represented tactical retreats by the establishment, whose strategic purpose was to calm troubled waters and condition the public to be less shocked if something really got shaken loose one of these days. In this sense, what The Plot to Kill the President does is to plant the idea subliminally that, after all, it IS possible for a secret government agency to get mixed up in such things as assassinations. Thus, if Hunt & Co. were to panic or revolt against becoming scapegoats and begin blurting out a few facts or pointing a few fingers, we all have little doubt who'd be embarrassed. If this should happen, anyone who had read this book could, subconsciously, with a little help, equate their revelations with fiction. It this was the ~~original~~ intention, and if Hunt HAD talked, this book would have been given a tremendous buildup.

As it worked out, the book appears not to have been needed after all, and so appears only as an unheralded paperback.

As to who wrote it, the obvious candidate is Hunt, but I have doubts. If he actually has written 46 novels, this could be one if it can be assumed that in so many tries he learned anything about writing novels. However, the one person I've talked to who has actually seen one of his books held his nose while discussing it.

Probably the two strongest arguments for Hunt being the author are the persistent play with names (both Kelly-Kelley and Harold Marcus are valid examples and might prove irresistible to anyone so inclined) and the sexual furniture of The Plot. Hunt is supposed to be very fond of this sort of thing. The two actual incidents in The Plot are not essential and appear to have been injected, perhaps after an editorial conference. (I once knew a paperback author who figured he had to have somebody laid in every chapter or at least every other chapter or it wouldn't sell). And while extraneous, at least one of the sex passages could have been handled with considerable less finesse. In other words, while not very good, I think of it as probably beyond Hunt.

My strongest feeling that it can't be Hunt comes from the impression of objectivity and non-involvement that comes through from the author. This corresponds with nothing emerging about Hunt that I can think of. But if not Hunt, who? I can think of no one, and so can't write him off.

jdw 20Feb73

Larry, Jim White sent this carbon of his impressions of The Plot to Bill the President before my note about your telling me there is, too, a real Jack Pearl. Or, perhaps, as I sometimes do with accumulating envelopes, I put it in the wrong one. Carrying what Jim says about Epstein and Thompson one step further, Epstein was soon enough being escorted by FBI agents and in his anti-black work had DJ help and Mitchell's free advertising. Thompson assailed all the critics, from most of whom he stole, pretending to be the only scholar. Had he made a different recommendation to the publisher for whom he read a ms by a very fine very bright 19-year-old, that book would have been published a year ago. All such books, whether or not so intended, serve to diminish interest in the subject and any credibility. If you have no use for the carbon, don't throw it away. It can serve as a reminder to me in my Romero file. Jim forgot to mention Farewell America, which typifies another category, putright fakes. Others besides Romero are kicking around. IM 2/26/73 cc JAW

HW: An extra copy here for LF if you think he'd be interested IF and when you write to him.

jdw23feb73